



## **The Black Hole in Isaiah A Study of Exile as a Literary Theme**

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FREDERIK POULSEN

# The Black Hole in Isaiah

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Frederik Poulsen

# The Black Hole in Isaiah

A Study of Exile as a Literary Theme

Mohr Siebeck

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Denne afhandling er af Det Teologiske Fakultet ved Københavns Universitet antaget til offentligt at forsvares for den teologiske doktorgrad.

Dekan Kirsten Busch Nielsen  
København, den 9. juli 2018

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*Til Maren*





## Preface

The present monograph was written between July 2015 and November 2017. It was submitted in December 2017 to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Copenhagen for evaluation with the intent of defending it for the doctoral degree (*dr.theol.*). In July 2018 the Academic Council accepted it for defense. The oral defense will take place in March 2019. I am grateful to the members of the assessment committee Ulrich Berges, Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, and Jesper Høgenhagen for their evaluation and to the series editors of FAT for accepting this work for publication. With the permission of the dean, a number of small errors in the original manuscript have been corrected.

The monograph was written thanks to a postdoctoral scholarship from the Independent Research Fund Denmark and its *Sapere Aude* program. The generous grant has offered me completely undisturbed time for studying the poetically rich and theologically challenging vision of Isaiah, arguably the most exciting book of the Bible. I did not think scholarships like these still existed, but they do, and I am very grateful to have been the recipient of one.

My research was carried out at the Department for Biblical Exegesis at the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen. I would like to thank my colleagues for their pleasant and inspiring company over the years. I am grateful to Hermann Spieckermann who first encouraged me to explore exile in Isaiah and Francis Landy who read and discussed an early version of the book. Parts of the initial chapters were written during my research stay at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the Spring of 2016, and the manuscript was completed during my stay at the University of Bonn in the Fall of 2017. I would like to thank my local hosts, Ronnie Goldstein (Jerusalem) and Ulrich Berges (Bonn), for hospitality and stimulating talks. I am particularly thankful to Sarah Hussell for the excellent effort in proofreading and improving my English.

Family and friends have continuously supported and encouraged me during the work on this book. I am most grateful to my wife Maren and our children Johan, Samuel, and Ada for their love and care. Living with you, Maren, is like eating raisin cakes and apples all day long. This book is for you.

Frederik Poulsen  
October 2018



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## Introduction

Any study of exile in the book of Isaiah has to consider a peculiar contradiction. On the one hand, exile appears to be a central theme in the book; on the other, it is difficult to detect references to it. Francis Landy cogently writes: “Isaiah is all about exile – but in a way it is not about exile at all.”<sup>1</sup> While other biblical writings explicitly depict the destruction of Jerusalem and the people’s deportation to Babylon in the early sixth century BCE, Isaiah is apparently silent. At the center of the book where readers would expect to find an account of these traumatic and defining events, there is just an abrupt break and a clear leap in time. Isaiah 39, which concerns the prophet’s encounter with King Hezekiah in the end of the eighth century BCE, predicts the fall of Jerusalem and its captivity to Babylon. The following vision in Isa 40, which seems to reflect a situation at least 160 years later, happily proclaims the end of exile and hope for future restoration. Yet the intermediate period – the exile *itself* – is not mentioned at all.

Why this apparent absence? Hugh Williamson states: “Exile is certainly not characteristic of Isaiah himself.”<sup>2</sup> Although the statement concerns the historical prophet living in the eighth century, it could be seen to cover most of the scholarly engagement with the book as a whole. Isaiah is thought to be about something else. Pervasive themes in the prophetic corpus include YHWH’s protection and glorification of Zion, divine kingship, the issue of justice and righteousness, the inclusion of nations into the salvific realm, and the role of human agents such as the Messiah and the servant. However, even when the theme of exile is concerned, the primary focus lies on Isaiah’s proclamation of release and restoration from it. To many interpreters, so it seems, experiences of exile may historically have shaped the composition and editorial reworking of several passages in Isaiah, especially those found in Isa 40–55, but the book as a whole is about something else. Exile itself simply disappears in the break between Isa 39 and 40.

The thesis of the present monograph is that exile in Isaiah hides itself as a “black hole” at the center of the composition and thereby has a decisive influence on the literary structure, poetic imagery, and theological message of the book. The gap between Isa 39 and 40 is like a black hole in space that, by its

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<sup>1</sup> Landy, “Exile,” 241.

<sup>2</sup> Williamson, *Isaiah 1–5*, 368.

tremendous gravity, pulls everything to itself. Even light cannot escape from it. As a result, one can only study a black hole by looking at its effects on the surroundings. In a similar manner, exile conceals itself at the center of the prophetic book. Apparently, nothing happens – there is just a blank space – but something decisive must take place. Exile is such a strong force that it absorbs life, light, and hope and only causes silence, darkness, and death. Therefore, one can only study exile in Isaiah by analyzing events and anticipations leading up to it and subsequent effects and reflections of it.

As the first comprehensive treatment, this monograph investigates exile as a literary and theological theme in Isaiah. The following introduction provides an overview of recent approaches to the study of exile in the Old Testament and a review of past scholarly works on this topic in Isaiah to situate the present investigation within the larger field of studies. Then, I offer some methodological considerations and sketch the overall structure of the monograph.

## Approaches to the study of exile

Until the late 1960s, the exile – commonly understood to be the Babylonian exile (587–538 BCE) – was largely seen as a time of degeneration in the development of Israelite/Jewish religion.<sup>3</sup> Julius Wellhausen, for instance, regarded the effects of the exile to be very negative and damaging, introducing an unconstructive period of priestly and legalistic thought. An important challenge to this dominating view, however, was Peter R. Ackroyd's book *Exile and Restoration* (1968) and its thesis that the sixth century was a dynamic and creative age for the formation and editorial shaping of much of the Old Testament literature.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1980s, a significant shift has occurred and in recent biblical scholarship the exile is studied not only as a historical event or period, but also as a broader social and cultural phenomenon. Three general approaches to the critical study of exile in biblical literature have emerged: historical-archeological, sociological, and literary.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the informative reviews of scholarship in Ahn, *Forced Migrations*, 8–27; Kelle, “Interdisciplinary Approach.”

<sup>4</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ahn, “Exile,” 197, and the headings for grouping essays in Ahn and Middlemas, *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon*. A fourth approach would be the reception-historical study of the interpretation of exile in later Jewish and Christian writings. Seminal works in this connection are Michael A. Knibb's article “The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period” (1976) and the collection of essays in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (1997) edited by James M. Scott. Works that are more recent include the co-authored book *From Babylon to Eternity: The Exile Remembered and Constructed in Text and Tradition* (2009) and the dictionary article “Exile” in *Encyclopedia of*

The *historical-archeological* approach attempts to produce a critical and reliable reconstruction of the sixth century, centering on the Babylonian campaigns against Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its inhabitants, and the conditions for those who were deported and for those who remained in Judah. In addition to biblical texts, the examined material consists of archeological findings and Ancient Near Eastern sources and practices, including cuneiform texts from the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods.<sup>6</sup> Hans Barstad's *The Myth of the Empty Land* (1996) largely initiated a reassessment of the history and archeology of the period and was soon followed by the collection of papers in *Leading Captivity Captive* (1998) edited by Lester L. Grabbe.<sup>7</sup> A major outcome of this reexamination has been a growing awareness of the discrepancy between the biblical picture of the exilic period and historical reconstructions of it. This is clear in two recent collections of articles: *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (2010) edited by Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin and *Myths of Exile: History and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (2015) edited by Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme and Ingrid Hjelm.<sup>8</sup> Both volumes stress the literary creativity of biblical authors in their representations of the exile and its effects. Moreover, whereas past scholarship tended to reduce the period to one homogenous monolithic experience, recent works have emphasized the manifold and diverse aspects of this century in Judean history.<sup>9</sup> Attention has been drawn to the fact that there were three different instances of deportation in the early sixth century (597, 587, and 582 BCE) which should not be conflated and which deserve equal treatment. Furthermore, Judean communities not only existed in Babylon and Judah, but also in Assyria (following King Shalmaneser's capture of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE), Egypt, and several other places.

The *sociological* approach draws on methodologies and insights from social-scientific disciplines and studies exile as a broader cultural phenomenon

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*the Bible and its Reception* (2014). Furthermore, Jörn Kiefer's *Exil und Diaspora: Begrifflichkeit und Deutungen im antiken Judentum und in der hebräischen Bibel* (2005) offers a dense lexicographical study of exilic terminology in the Bible and its reception in antique sources.

<sup>6</sup> See Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Neo-Babylonian Period*; Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*; Stökl and Waerzeggers, *Exile and Return*.

<sup>7</sup> Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land*; Grabbe, *Leading Captivity Captive*.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Zvi and Levin, *Concept of Exile*; Gudme and Hjelm, *Myths of Exile*, 1–4. See also the four essays devoted to historical issues in Ahn and Middlemas, *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon*, 9–62.

<sup>9</sup> Ahn, *Forced Migrations*, 27–34; cf. Gudme and Hjelm, *Myths of Exile*, 4: "There is not one Exile in the Hebrew Bible, there are many, and there is not one interpretation of or portrayal of Exile in the biblical texts, there are as many as there are biblical authors – sometimes even more."

across time. The approach is interdisciplinary in nature as it seeks to place the biblical texts in close dialogue with sociological, anthropological, and psychological analysis. This is often done by comparing the experiences of exile reflected in the Bible to contemporary experiences, patterns, and social realities, informed by various modern sub-disciplines such as disaster studies, refugee studies, and trauma theory. A pioneer in this approach is Daniel L. Smith-Christopher. His groundbreaking book *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (1989) applies sociological methodology to the study of the exilic period and its literature, and his *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (2002) relates this concern to larger ethical and theological issues.<sup>10</sup> A scholar who has followed in these footsteps is John J. Ahn. His *Exile as Forced Migrations* (2011) studies the social structures of forced migration.<sup>11</sup> Drawing extensively on contemporary theories of migrations, economics, and generation issues among refugees, he seeks to understand the distinct waves of forced migrations in the sixth century and the exilic experience and identity formation of each successive generation of Judeans living in Babylon. Several essays in the recent volume *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (2012) edited by Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritschel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright likewise examine the biblical experiences in conjunction with the general phenomenon of exile.<sup>12</sup> The volume incorporates broader cross-disciplinary perspectives and offers a series of case studies which compare the stories of migration in the Bible with those of modern refugee crises and diaspora communities.

The *literary* approach focuses on the textual representations and expressions of exile in the Bible. The object of study is the literary responses to the exile and its impacts on the poetic and theological reflection of biblical authors. Initially, it is striking to notice that separate books and passages speak very differently about exile and employ a whole range of literary genres, including historiography, laments, hymns, and prophecy. As was mentioned, Peter R. Ackroyd's *Exile and Restoration* (1968) stresses the literary activity and creativity of the exilic period. He concentrates on thoughts rather than events and seeks to trace patterns of reflection and religious development in the reactions to the exile and exilic situation by examining the various texts from this period, including Jeremiah, the Deuteronomistic History, the Priestly work, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and poetic passages.

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Religion of the Landless*; Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. See also his retrospective assessment of the development of the approach in Smith-Christopher, "Reading Exile Then."

<sup>11</sup> Ahn, *Forced Migrations*.

<sup>12</sup> Kelle, Ames, and Wright, *Interpreting Exile*. See also the four essays devoted to sociological issues in Ahn and Middlemas, *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon*, 125–89.

Not surprisingly, subsequent scholarly introductions to the literature of the period share this way of ordering and presenting the biblical material.<sup>13</sup>

Rainer Albertz's presentation of the history and literature of the sixth century in *Israel in Exile* (2003) likewise highlights the large-scale literary activity of this century: "Approximately half of the material in the Hebrew Bible came into being or was substantially shaped during this era."<sup>14</sup> The primary focus of this comprehensive introduction is a detailed examination of the genres and writings assigned to this period, including their literary reconstruction, their political and religious substance, and their socio-historical context. In contrast to Ackroyd's interest in the development of religious thought, Albertz pays more attention to literary issues of form, composition, and origin. In particular, he emphasizes the role of editorial activity in the formation and reworking of biblical literature.

With regard to literary representations of exile in biblical texts, Robert P. Carroll has written two important articles: "Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature" (1997) and "Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourses of Diaspora" (1998).<sup>15</sup> While Ackroyd and Albertz stress the exilic period as a dynamic age for the production of literature, Carroll highlights the importance of exile as a literary motif in the biblical corpus as a whole: "The Hebrew Bible is the book of exile. It is constituted in and by narratives and discourses of expulsion, deportation and exile."<sup>16</sup> In the former article, he offers an informative survey of the range of the discourses of deportation, destruction, and return in prophetic texts.<sup>17</sup> In the latter article, he considers the relation between the biblical language of exile and the historical events that this language may reflect. Carroll writes:

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<sup>13</sup> Ralph W. Klein's *Israel in Exile* (1979) examines six literary works – "six exilic voices" – and their responses to the theological challenges of exile: Lamentations and exilic psalms, the Deuteronomistic History, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, and P. More recently, Jill Middlemas' *The Templeless Age* (2007) introduces the biblical literature of the exilic century along thematic lines and types of reactions. They include: a lack of future vision (certain psalms, Isa 63:7–64:11, Lamentations, and the Deuteronomistic History), the intermingling of judgment and hope (Jeremiah and Ezekiel), and a turn to hope (Deutero-Isaiah, Ezek 40–48, Haggai, Zech 1–8, and the Holiness Code).

<sup>14</sup> Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, ix. The original German version appeared two years earlier (*Die Exilszeit: 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*) in Kohlhammer's *Biblische Enzyklopädie* series.

<sup>15</sup> Carroll, "Deportation"; "Exile."

<sup>16</sup> Carroll, "Deportation," 64; cf. "Exile," 63: "Exile and exodus: those are the two sides or faces of the myth that shapes the subtext of the narratives and rhetoric of the Hebrew Bible. Between these twin topoi (and their mediating notion of the empty land) is framed, constructed and constituted the essential story of the Hebrew Bible."

<sup>17</sup> Recent surveys of the rhetoric of exile in the prophets include David L. Petersen's "Prophetic Rhetoric and Exile" (2015) and Cian Power's "Constructions of Exile in the Persian Period" (2015) and "Images of Northern Exile" (2019).

Exile is a biblical trope and, whether it may be treated as an event in the real socio-economic historical world outside the text or not, it should be treated as a fundamental element in the cultural poetics of biblical discourses. It may have historical referents, but it is as a root metaphor that it contributes most to the biblical narrative.<sup>18</sup>

The main point is that the biblical representations of exile do not need to relate to history at all. The employed tropes *may* reflect historical events, but they do not *have* to. In several cases, it is difficult to determine whether we encounter reflections of real experiences or imaginative constructs.<sup>19</sup>

John Kessler's article "Images of Exile" (2010) provides a highly informative overview of literary representations of "exile" and "empty land" in the sixth to fourth century literature.<sup>20</sup> Attention is drawn to the centrality of these motifs in biblical literature and the different form and function of them in various writings from the period.<sup>21</sup> Martien A. Halvorson-Taylor's *Enduring Exile: The Metaphorization of the Exile in the Hebrew Bible* (2011) studies the transformation of exile from geographical dislocation to a symbol of a variety of alienations, including political disenfranchisement and an existential alienation from God.<sup>22</sup> She analyzes in depth the use of metaphors for exile in a series of passages from Jer 30–31, Isa 40–66, and Zech 1–8. Samuel Balentine's article "The Prose and Poetry of Exile" (2012) offers insightful considerations on the significance of various genres for mourning and recording the suffering of exile.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the prophetic literature, two recent collections of papers are of relevance. The first one is *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (2015) edited by Mark J. Boda, Frank Ritzel Ames, John Ahn, and Mark Leuchter.<sup>24</sup> The volume draws attention to the recurrent motif of exile-forced migration in Old Testament prophecy. The second is the volume *Images of Exile in the Prophetic Literature* (2019) edited by Jesper Høgenhaven, Cian

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<sup>18</sup> Carroll, "Exile," 64.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Gudme and Hjelm, *Myths of Exile*, 3–4: "the theme of exile in the Hebrew Bible should not only be viewed as an echo of traumatic historical events, but also as a literary theme that is taken up and reworked in a variety of ways by the biblical authors in order to build specific identities and to express ideology."

<sup>20</sup> Kessler, "Images of Exile."

<sup>21</sup> Kessler ("Images of Exile," 315–47) groups the examined texts in seven sections: 1. Texts favoring the 597 exiles (Jer 24; Ezek 11:14–21); 2. Inclusion of all the Babylonian exiles (Ezek 33:21–29); 3. Exclusion of the Egyptian Diaspora (Jer 40:7–41:18; 42:1–22; 43:1–13; 44:1–30); 4. Full emptying of the land as a result of Israel's disobedience (Lev 26:14–45; Deut 28:15–68); 5. The Babylonian *golah* as the sole repository of authentic Yahwism (2 Kings 25:22–26; Ezra-Nehemiah); 6. Full return of those scattered in Yahweh's judgment (Zech 1–8, Isaiah, Micah); and 7. No exile and no empty land (Haggai).

<sup>22</sup> Halvorson-Taylor, *Enduring Exile*.

<sup>23</sup> Balentine, "Prose and Poetry."

<sup>24</sup> Boda, Ames, Ahn and Leuchter, *Prophets*.

Power, and myself.<sup>25</sup> Several of the essays reflect on the language and metaphors that the prophets use to express the experience of exile.

## Recent studies of exile in Isaiah

Two main factors have shaped past scholarship on exile in Isaiah. First, an important drawback of Bernhard Duhm's division of the book into three major sections (Isa 1–39, 40–55, and 56–66) was that scholars have approached these sections in almost complete isolation from one another as if they are independent prophetic books. This division has implied that the study of exile in Isaiah throughout the twentieth century in practice has focused on Isa 40–55 alone. A common assumption has been that these chapters should be assigned to an anonymous sixth-century author – “the Great Prophet of the Exile” – who lived among the Judean exiles in Babylon and addressed their needs.<sup>26</sup> Second, the frequent observation that Isa 40–55 from the very outset looks back on the exile as something that is now over has made scholars concentrate on the proclamation of hope and restoration rather than on the experience of exile itself.<sup>27</sup> With regard to exile, several of the works on Isa 40–55 are systematic presentations of the alleged response of this prophet to the theological problems of the exilic period.<sup>28</sup>

An illustrative example is Peter R. Ackroyd's treatment of Isaiah in *Exile and Restoration* (1968) which because of its interest in the literature of the sixth century limits itself to Isa 40–55.<sup>29</sup> He locates the prophetic author in Babylon and looks for those features in the chapters that illuminate the exilic

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<sup>25</sup> Høgenhaven, Poulsen and Power, *Images of Exile*.

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent overview, see Tiemeyer, *Comfort*, 13–51. Cf. also the recent essay “Provenance as a Factor in Interpretation” (2015) by Christopher R. Seitz in which he discusses the role of setting (historical reconstructions vs. canonical context) for reading Isa 40–55.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 380: “the book of Deutero-Isaiah is the only prophetic book of the exilic period that contains nothing but prophecy of salvation.”

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Ralph Klein (*Israel in Exile*, 97–124) interprets Isa 40–55 as one long response to the exiled people's doubts about YHWH's ability and willingness to save: “the author sang his message into the dark night of Israel's exile.” Jill Middlemas (*The Templeless Age*, 94–111) also emphasizes the jubilant message that YHWH is acting salvifically in the midst of the exiles. In her opinion, Isa 40–55 has two goals: to stir the exiled community to leave Babylon and to comfort the despairing people. Rainer Albertz (*Israel in Exile*, 376–433) offers a rather technical examination of the historical development of the literary composition of Isa 40–55, proposing two editions, each of which has a distinctive theological message.

<sup>29</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 118–37. Three pages in a subsequent chapter deal with selected texts from Isa 56–66 under the heading “Passages reflecting restoration”; see *Exile and Restoration*, 228–30.

situation. In his presentation, Ackroyd initially makes a division between “the backward and forward looking of the prophet,” that is, between the understanding of disaster and the prospect of salvation.<sup>30</sup> The first section – “The people’s present condition” – examines the exile as YHWH’s punishment of his people because of sin, thereby drawing more attention to their depressing condition in Isa 40–55 than other interpreters are perhaps willing to.<sup>31</sup> The people themselves are seen to be wholly responsible for their present condition of humiliation: “The exile is at one and the same time a proper punishment for what Israel has been in the past and an act of discipline by which the future may be assured.”<sup>32</sup> The second section – “The future hope” – then presents the various images of redemption in Isa 40–55, including the release from captivity, the exodus-like return, and the complete restoration of the land by means of YHWH’s creative power. All of these ideals are expressions of hope formulated against the background of exile.

While *Exile and Restoration* limits itself to Isa 40–55, Peter Ackroyd has dealt with passages in Isa 1–39 in later works.<sup>33</sup> His article “An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile” (1974) in particular is an excellent identification of literary motifs of exile in Isa 38–39 (cf. 2 Kings 20) and contains an informative discussion of the purpose of these chapters within the overall composition of Isaiah.<sup>34</sup>

As far as I am aware, the recent rediscovery of the unity of Isaiah has not yet resulted in elaborate examinations of the theme of exile in the prophetic composition as a whole. Nevertheless, one can find briefer treatments of this issue in some of the works referred to in the previous section. The opening of Robert P. Carroll’s four-page review (1997)<sup>35</sup> highlights the importance of the motif:

Isaiah is the great scroll of diaspora discourses in the prophetic collection in the Hebrew Bible. It is shot through with images of devastation and deportation, of fugitives driven from their homeland and of abandoned territory which testifies to a disrupted cultivation, with loss of the civic centre.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 121: “Here we may distinguish, in spite of obvious interrelationship, between the prophet’s understanding of how his people has come to be where it is, and the anticipation which he shows of events in which God is acting and will continue to act to effect his purposes.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the criticism in Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 126.

<sup>33</sup> Ackroyd, *Studies*.

<sup>34</sup> The article was originally published in *Scottish Journal of Theology*; see Ackroyd, *Studies*, 152–71.

<sup>35</sup> Carroll, “Deportation,” 73–77.

<sup>36</sup> Carroll, “Deportation,” 73.



Among others, he observes that the notion of the great return of the dispersed ones (e.g. 14:1–2; 19:18–25; 27:12–13; 43:5–6; 49:12) and the flow of nations to Jerusalem (e.g. 2:1–4; 66:12, 18) are pervasive themes in the book as a whole, contributing to its diasporic discourses: “the scroll itself represents a magnificent panorama of alienation, deportation and homecoming.”<sup>37</sup>

John Kessler’s three-page review (2010)<sup>38</sup> likewise observes that “the motif of vast devastation followed by scattering and ultimately re-gathering of all Israel is [...] a highly important motif in the Isaianic corpus.”<sup>39</sup> As a test case, he examines Isa 6:1–11:16. Like bookends, Isa 6:11–13 and 11:11–16 “introduce and then resolve the matter of the exile and empty land in the section.”<sup>40</sup> Kessler draws attention to an important feature which forms a contrast to other biblical accounts of the exile. In Isaiah, there is no favored or excluded group. The basic polarity is not between various groups within the people (e.g. those who were exiled and those who remained in the land), but between the prophet as YHWH’s messenger and the population in toto: “The people of God consist of all the descendants of Israel [...] All have disobeyed and as a result judgment has come upon all.”<sup>41</sup> He furthermore observes “the highly schematized vision” of these Isaianic texts.<sup>42</sup> In Isaiah’s vision, the complete devastation and forsakenness of the land balance its complete restoration and repopulation.

A series of recent studies on exile in Isaiah has engaged in shorter passages or sections. Bradley C. Gregory’s article, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah” (2007), offers a reading of Isa 61:1–3 in light of Second Temple hermeneutics.<sup>43</sup> He attempts to demonstrate that this Isaianic passage is one of the earliest attestations to the concept of an enduring exile, that is, exile as an ongoing state beyond the geographical and temporal bounds of the Babylonian captivity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Carroll, “Deportation,” 76.

<sup>38</sup> Kessler, “Images of Exile,” 341–44.

<sup>39</sup> Kessler, “Images of Exile,” 341. As examples of texts, he lists Isa 6:11–13; 11:11, 16; 14:2; 43:1–7; 44:24–28; 45:12–13; 48:20–21; 49:19–26; 51:9–11; 60:1–22; 62:1–8; 66:10–16.

<sup>40</sup> Kessler, “Images of Exile,” 342.

<sup>41</sup> Kessler, “Images of Exile,” 343.

<sup>42</sup> Kessler, “Images of Exile,” 343: “There is no distinction between various groups of Yahwists based upon their geographical location, their redemptive sufferings, or their fate during the period of Yahweh’s judgment upon the land. Neither is there any explicit mention of their repentance or responsiveness to Yahweh.”

<sup>43</sup> Gregory, “Postexilic Exile.”

<sup>44</sup> See also the essay “The Individualization of Exile in Trito-Isaiah” (2019) by Ulrich Berges in which he explores how exile is turned into an individual and existential condition which can only be overcome by a certain ethical behavior.

Fredrik Häggglund's dissertation *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile* (2008) aims at understanding what problem Isa 53 addresses and seeks to answer.<sup>45</sup> He regards the specific historical problem behind this text to be a conflict regarding repatriation of the Judean exiles returning from Babylon in the late sixth century, because those who had remained in the land were reluctant to receive them. Isaiah 53, so he argues, encourages the people in the land to embrace the returnees as ones who have suffered on their behalf. Although Häggglund's main approach is historical, he applies a series of theories and methodologies in his investigation of the text of Isa 53, its notions of vicarious suffering and of exclusion and embrace, and its literary, geographical, and social contexts. Notably, in line with Smith-Christopher, Häggglund draws from modern refugee studies and the issues they present about the problems of homecoming in order to shed further light on the social conflict reflected in the biblical text.<sup>46</sup>

The application of a contemporary, sociological perspective to Isaiah is also present in Gregory Lee Cuéllar's monograph *Voices of Marginality: Exile and Return in Second Isaiah 40–55 and the Mexican Immigrant Experience* (2008).<sup>47</sup> He employs insights from postcolonial studies and diaspora theology. A central aim of the work is to compare the rhetoric of Isa 40–55 to the Mexican *corrido* ballad songs, a traditional type of folk song, the lyrics of which describe aspects of Mexican immigrant experiences in the United States. Cuéllar attempts to demonstrate that there are shared socio-political and socio-religious concerns between the *corridos* and Isa 40–55 and that both groups of texts share a series of themes (e.g. marginalization, longing for home, yearning to return). In his view, the biblical and Mexican experience can inform each other.

Finally, two recent works, both of which are of particular significance to my own study, are devoted to the literary character of exile in Isaiah. The first one is Francis Landy's essay "Exile in the Book of Isaiah" (2010) which offers some highly original and inspiring ideas about this issue in the prophetic composition as a whole.<sup>48</sup> His essay is both thought-provoking and demanding. As cited at the beginning of the introduction, Landy initially observes an apparent contradiction. Exile is central to the structure and message of Isaiah, but it is very hard to find. On the one hand, all of the major sections of the book are concerned with exile. Isaiah 1–39 foreshadows the disaster of the early sixth century and the restoration from it by the fall of Samaria and the deliverance of Judah in the eighth century. The feeling of deep loss and

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<sup>45</sup> Häggglund, *Isaiah 53*.

<sup>46</sup> Häggglund, *Isaiah 53*, 156–72.

<sup>47</sup> Cuéllar, *Voices of Marginality*.

<sup>48</sup> Landy, "Exile." His approach is advanced in the essay "Metaphors of Death and Exile in Isaiah" (2019).

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